

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 9, 2006

The Honorable Conrad Burns
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior
United States Senate
132 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Byron Dorgan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior
United States Senate
160 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Burns and Ranking Member Dorgan:


As the Subcommittee prepares to markup the fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior and related agencies, we respectfully request your support for increasing funding for biomass-utilization grant programs that are critical to cost-effective long-term forest restoration and sustainable economic development in our rural communities.

Specifically, we propose funding the biomass-use grant programs authorized by section 210 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (Pub. L. 109-58; 119 Stat. 658-659) and increasing the President's proposed funding for the Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program. The biomass use programs authorized by section 210 are authorized under the direction of the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior for \$50 million per year. Although a much greater investment is warranted, we believe that appropriating \$6 million for the section 210 programs is both sufficient to get them underway and realistic given the tight budget. Similarly, we believe that an additional \$3 million should be provided for the Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program, and that it should be available for biomass utilization, community capacity building, and technical and marketing assistance.

The General Accountability Office recently reported that federal financial incentives and benefits were the primary factors in facilitating the use of woody biomass. It also reported that transportation costs continue to hamper this use. The Departments' recently-released Cohesive Fuels Treatment Strategy states that "without expanding the ability of the private sector to remove biomass from public lands, we cannot address the excessive fuels problem in a timely and efficient way."

Funding for these programs is critical to meeting the missions of the forest-management agencies, is effective in helping the economies of our rural forest communities, and plays an important role in developing alternative sources of energy.

Sincerely,



Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator



Jon Kyl
United States Senator

Ken Salazar

Maria Cantu

Patty Murray

Mary Landrieu

Hillary Rodham Clinton

C. H. Sten

Jim Jeffords

Max Baucus

Russell D. Feingold

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Bubba Baker

Mark Dayton